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THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION—

WHENCE IS IT?

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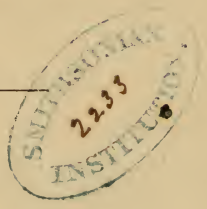

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AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,

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PREFACE.

JEREMY TAYLOR, in his "Treatise on the Rule of Conscience," had occasion to speak a good deal at large upon the weight that moral evidence has in persuading the human understanding.

Among other things, he says:

"Probable arguments are like little stars, every one of which will be useless as to our conduct and enlightening; but when they are tied together by order and vicinity, by the finger of God and the hand of an angel, they make a constellation, and are not only powerful in their influence, but like a bright angel, to guide and enlighten our way."

He then proceeds to illustrate his position by an instance of moral demonstration, proving that the Religion of JESUS CHRIST is from GOD.

His argument, on that occasion, with a few slight changes, constitutes this book.

It is commended to the reader as one of the most interesting and persuasive Discourses to be found any where, within the same compass, in the English language.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

WHENCE IS IT?

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1. This discourse, of all matters disputable in the world, requires fewest things to be granted; even nothing but what was evident; even nothing but the very subject of the question:—That there was such a man as Jesus Christ, that he pretended such things and taught such doctrines: for he that undertakes to prove these things to be from God, must be allowed that they were from something or other.

But this admission I do not ask for need, but for order's sake and art; for what the histories of that age reported as a public affair, as one of the most eminent transactions of the world, that which made so much noise, which caused so many changes, which occasioned so many wars, which divided so many hearts,

which altered so many families, which procured so many deaths, which obtained so many laws in favour, and suffered so many imperial decrees in the disfavour of itself; that which was not done in a corner, but was thirty-three years and more in acting; which caused so many sects, and was opposed by so much art, and so much power, that it might not grow; which filled the world with noise; which effected such great changes in the bodies of men, by curing the diseased, and smiting the contumacious or the hypocrites; which drew so many eyes, and filled so many tongues, and employed so many pens, and was the care and the question of the whole world at that time, and immediately after; that which was perpetuated by public acts and records of courts, which was in the books of friends and enemies; which came accompanied and remarked with eclipses, and stars, and prodigies of heaven and earth, that which the Jews, even in spite, and against their wills confessed, and which cunning adversaries intending to overthrow, could never so much as challenge want of truth in the matter of fact and story; that

which they who are infinitely concerned that it should not be believed—or more, that it had never been—do yet only labour to make it to appear not to have been divine: certainly, that this thing was, is so certain, that the defenders of it need not account it a kindness to have it presupposed. For never was any story in the world that had so many degrees of credibility, as the story of the person, life, and death of Jesus Christ: and if he were not a true prophet, yet that he was in the world, and said and did such things, cannot be denied; for even concerning Mahomet, we make no question but he was in the world, and led a great part of mankind after him, and what was less proved we infinitely believe; and what all men say, and no man denies, and was notorious in itself, of this we may make further inquiries whether it was all that which it pretended; but that it did make pretences, and was in the world, needs no more probation.

2. But now, whether Jesus Christ was sent from God, and delivered the will of God, we are to take accounts from all the things of the world, which were on him, or about him, or from him.

Consider first, his person.

He was foretold by all the prophets; he, I say, for that appears by the event, and the correspondence of their sayings to his person: he was described by infallible characteristics which did fit him, and did never fit any but him; for when he was born, then was the fulness of time, and the Messiah was expected at the time when Jesus did appear, which gave occasion to many of the godly then to wait for him, and to hope to live till the time of his revelation: and they did so, and with a spirit of prophecy which their own nation did confess and honour, glorified God at the revelation. And the most excellent and devout persons that were conspicuous for their piety, did then rejoice in him, and confess him; and the expectation of him, at that time, was so public and famous, that it gave occasion to divers impostors to abuse the credulity of the people in pretending to be the Messiah. But not only did the predictions of the time point him out, but at his birth a strange star appeared, which guided certain Levantine princes and sages to the inquiry after him; a strange star which

had an irregular place, and an irregular motion, that came by design, and acted by counsel, the counsel of the Almighty guide. It moved from place to place, till it stood just over the house where the babe did sleep; a star of which the heathen knew much, who knew nothing of him; a star which Chalcidius affirmed to have signified the descent of God for the salvation of man; a star that guided the wise Chaldees to worship him with gifts, as the same disciple of Plato does affirm, and as the Holy Scriptures deliver. And this star could be no secret: it troubled all the country; it put Herod upon strange arts of security for his kingdom; it effected a sad tragedy accidentally, for it occasioned the death of all the little babes in the city and vicinage of Bethlehem.

This is that Jesus, who, as he was learned without a master, so he was a man without age, a doctor in a child's garment, disputing in the sanctuary at twelve years old. He was a sojourner in Egypt, because the poor babe, born of an indigent mother, was a formidable rival to a potent king; and this fear could not come

from the design of the infant, but must needs arise from the illustriousness of the birth, and the prophecies of the child, and the sayings of the learned, and the journey of the wise men, and the decrees of God. This journey, and the return, were both managed by the conduct of an angel, and a divine dream—for to the Son of God all the angels did rejoice to minister. This blessed Person—made thus excellent by his Father, and glorious by miraculous consignations, and illustrious by the ministry of heavenly spirits, and proclaimed to Mary and to Joseph by two angels, to the shepherds by a multitude of the heavenly host, to the wise men by a prophecy and by a star, to the Jews by the shepherds, to the Gentiles by the three wise men, to Herod by the doctors of the law, and to himself perfectly known by the incasing his human nature in the bosom and heart of God—was yet pleased, for thirty years together, to live an humble, a laborious, and a devout, a regular and an even, a wise and an exemplary, a pious and an obscure life, without complaint, without sin, without design of fame, or grandeur of spirit, till the time came that

the clefts of the rock were to open, and the diamond give its lustre, and be worn in the diadem of kings. And then this Person was wholly admirable; for he was ushered into the world by the voice of a loud crier in the wilderness—a person austere and wise, of a strange life, full of holiness and full of endurance, and a great preacher of righteousness—a man believed by all the people that he came from God—one who in his own nation gathered disciples publicly, and (which amongst them was a great matter) he was the doctor of a new institution, and baptized all the country, yet this man, so great, so revered, so followed, so listened to by king and people, by doctors and by idiots, by Pharisees and Sadducees, this man preached Jesus to the people, pointed out the Lamb of God, told that he must increase, and himself from all that fame must retire to give him place. He received him to baptism, after having with duty and modesty declared his own unworthiness to give, but rather a worthiness to receive baptism from the holy hands of Jesus; but at the solemnity, God sent down the Holy Spirit upon his holy Son, and

by a voice from heaven, a voice of thunder, (and God was in that voice,) declared that "this was his Son, and that he was delighted in him." This voice from heaven was such, so evident, so certain a conviction of what it did intend to prove, so known and accepted as the way of divine revelation under the second temple, that at that time, every man that desired a sign honestly, would have been satisfied with such a voice; it being the testimony by which God made all extraordinary things to be credible to his people, from the days of Ezra, to the death of the nation. And that there was such a voice, not only then, but divers times after, was as certain, and made as evident as things of that nature can ordinarily be made. For it being a matter of fact, cannot be supposed infinite, but limited to time and place, heard by a certain number of persons, and was as a clap of thunder upon ordinary accounts, which could be heard but by those within the sphere of its own activity; and reported by those to others, who are to give testimony, as testimonies are required, which are credible under the test of two or three disinterested,

honest and true men. And though this was done in the presence of more, and oftener than once, yet it was a divine testimony but at first, but is to be conveyed by the means of men; and as God thundered from heaven at the giving of the law—though that he did so, we have notice only from the books of Moses, received from the Jewish nation—so he did in the days of the Baptist, and so he did to Peter, James, and John, and so he did in the presence of the Pharisees, and many of the common people. And as it is not to be supposed, that all these would join their divided interests, for and against themselves, for the verification of a lie, so if they would have done it, they could not have done it without reproof of their own parties, who would have been glad by the discovery, only to disgrace the whole story. But if the report of honest and just men so reputed, may be questioned for matter of fact, or may not be accounted sufficient to make faith, when there is no pretence of men to the contrary; besides that we can have no story transmitted to us, nor records kept, no acts of courts, no narratives of the days of old, no tra-

ditions of our fathers; so there could not be left in nature any usual instrument whereby God could, after the manner of men, declare his own will to us, but either we should never know the will of heaven upon earth, or it must be that God must not only tell it once, but always, and not only always to some men, but always to all men. And then, as there would be no use of history, or the honesty of men, and their faithfulness in telling any act of God in declaration of his will, so there would be a perpetual necessity of miracles, and we could not serve God directly with our understanding, for there would be no such thing as faith, that is, of assent without conviction of understanding. And we could not please God with believing, because there would be in it nothing of the will, nothing of love and choice; and that faith which is, would be like that of Thomas, "to believe what we see or hear." And God should not at all govern upon earth, unless he did continually come himself: for then, all government, all teachers, all apostles, all messengers, would be needless, because they could not show to the eye, what they told

to the ears of men. And it might as well be disbelieved in all courts, and by all princes, that this was not the letter of a prince, or the act of a man, or the writing of his hand; and so all human intercourse must cease, and all senses but the eye be useless as to this affair, or else to the ear all voices must be strangers, but the principal, if I say no reports shall make faith. But it is certain, that when these voices were sent from heaven, and heard upon earth, they prevailed amongst many that heard them not, and disciples were multiplied upon such accounts; or else it must be that none that did hear them could be believed by any of their friends and neighbours; for if they were, the voice was as effective at the reflex and rebound, as in the direct emission, and could prevail with them that believed their brother or their friend, as certainly as with them that believed their own ears and eyes.

3. I need not speak of the vast numbers of miracles which he wrought; miracles which were not more demonstrations of his power than of his mercy; for they had nothing of pomp and ostentation, but infinitely of charity

and mercy, and that permanent, and lasting, and often: he opened the eyes of the blind; he made the crooked straight; he made the weak strong; he cured fevers with the touch of his hand, and an issue of blood with the hem of his garment, and sore eyes with the spittle of his mouth and the clay of the earth; he multiplied the loaves and fishes; he raised the dead to life, a young maiden, the widow's son of Nain, and Lazarus; and cast out devils by the word of his mouth; which he could never do but by the power of God. For Satan does not cast out Satan, nor a house fight against itself, if it means to stand long; and the devil could not help Jesus, because the holy Jesus taught men virtue, called them from worshipping devils, taught them to resist the devil, to lay aside all those abominable idolatries by which the devil doth rule in the hearts of men; he taught men to love God, to fly from temptations to sin, to hate and avoid all those things of which the devil is guilty. For Christianity forbids pride, envy, malice, lying, and yet affirms that the devil is proud, envious, malicious, and the father of lies; and,

therefore, wherever Christianity prevails, the devil is not worshipped: and, therefore, he that can think that a man, without the power of God, could overturn the devil's principles, cross his designs, weaken his strength, baffle him in his policy, befool him and turn him out of possession, and make him open his own mouth against himself, as he did often, and confess himself conquered by Jesus, and tormented, as the oracle did to Augustus Cæsar, and the devil to Jesus himself—he, I say, that thinks a mere man can do this, knows not the weakness of a man, nor the power of an angel. But he that thinks this could be done by compact and by consent of the devil, must think him to be an intelligence without understanding—a power without force—a fool to assist a power against himself, and to persecute the power he did assist, to stir up the world to destroy the Christians, whose Master and Lord he did assist to destroy himself; and when we read that Porphyrius, a heathen, a professed enemy to Christianity, did say, that "Since Jesus was worshipped, the gods could help no man," that is, the gods which they worshipped;

the poor, baffled demons; he must either think that the devils are as foolish as they are weak, or else that they did nothing towards this declination of their power; and, therefore, that they suffer it by a power higher than themselves, that is, by the power of God in the hand of Jesus.

4. But besides that God gave testimony from heaven concerning him, he also gave this testimony of himself to have come from God, because that "he did God's will;" for he that is a good man, and lives, by the laws of God and of his nation, a life innocent and simple, prudent and wise, holy and spotless, unreproved and unsuspected—he is certainly by all wise men, said, in a good sense, to be the Son of God; but he who does well and speaks well, and calls all men to glorify and serve God, and serves no ends but of holiness and charity, of wisdom of hearts and reformation of manners, this man carries great authority in his sayings, and ought to prevail with good men in good things, for good ends, which is all that is here required. But his nature was so sweet, his manners so humble, his words so

wise and composed, his comportment so grave and winning, his answers so seasonable, his questions so deep, his reproof so severe and charitable, his pity so great and merciful, his preachings so full of reason and holiness, of weight and authority, his conversation so useful and beneficent, his poverty great but his alms frequent, his family so holy and religious, his and their employment so profitable, his meekness so incomparable, his passions without difference, save only where zeal or pity carried him on to worthy and apt expressions; a person that never laughed, but often wept in a sense of the calamities of others; he loved every man and hated no man; he gave counsel to the doubtful and instructed the ignorant; he bound up the broken hearts and strengthened the feeble knees; he relieved the poor and converted the sinners; he despised none that came to him for relief, and as for those who did not, he went to them: he took all occasions of mercy that were offered him, and went abroad for more; he spent his days in preaching and healing, and his nights in prayers and conversation with God; he was

obedient to laws, and subject to princes, though he was the Prince of Judea in right of his mother, and of all the world in right of his Father. The people followed him, but he made no conventions, and when they were made, he suffered no tumults; when they would have made him a king, he withdrew himself; when he knew they would put him to death, he offered himself; he knew men's hearts, and conversed secretly, and gave answers to their thoughts, and anticipated their questions; he would work a miracle rather than give offence, and yet suffer every offence rather than see God his Father dishonoured; he exactly kept the law of Moses, to which he came to put a period, and yet chose to signify his purpose only by doing acts of mercy upon their Sabbath, doing nothing which they should call a breach of a commandment, but healing sick people, a charity which they themselves would do to beasts, and yet they were angry at him for doing it to their brethren. In all his life, and in all his conversation with his nation, he was innocent as an angel of light; and when, by the greatness of his worth, and the severity

of his doctrine, and the charity of his miracles, and the noises of the people, and his immense fame in all that part of the world, and the multitude of his disciples, and the authority of his sermons, and his free reproof of their hypocrisy, and his discovery of their false doctrines and weak traditions, he had branded the reputation of the vicious rulers of the people, and they resolved to put him to death—they who had the biggest malice in the world, and the weakest accusations, were forced to supply their want of articles against him by making truth to be his fault, and his office to be his crime, and his open confession of what was asked him, to be his article of condemnation. And yet, after all this, they could not persuade the competent judge to condemn him, or to find him guilty of any fault; and, therefore, they were forced to threaten him with Cæsar's name, against whom then they would pretend him to be an enemy, though in their charge they neither proved, nor indeed laid it against him; and yet, to whatsoever they objected he made no return, but his silence and his innocence were remarkable and evident, without

labor and reply, and needed no more argument than the sun needs an advocate to prove that he is the brightest light in the firmament.

5. Well, so it was, they crucified him; and when they did, they did as much put out the eye of heaven as destroy the Son of God; for when, with an incomparable sweetness, and a patience exemplar to all ages and sufferers, he endured affronts, examinations, scorns, insolences of rude, ungentle men; and scourgings, injurious, unjust, and unreasonable usage from those whom he obliged by all the arts of endearment and offers of the biggest kindness—at last he went to death as to the work which God appointed him, that he might become the world's sacrifice, and the great example of holiness, and the instance of representing by what way the world was to be made happy—even by sufferings, and so enter heaven—that he might, I say, become the Saviour of his enemies, and the elder Brother to his friends, and the Lord of glory, and the fountain of its emanation. Then it was that God gave new testimonies from heaven; the sun was eclipsed all the while he was upon the cross, and yet

the moon was in the full; that is, he lost his light, not because any thing in nature did invest him, but because the God of nature (as a heathen at that very time confessed, who yet saw nothing of this sad iniquity) did suffer. The rocks did rend, the veil of the temple divided of itself and opened the enclosure, and displayed the sanctuary, and made it pervious to the Gentile's eye: the dead arose, and appeared in Jerusalem to their friends; the centurion and divers of the people smote their breasts, and were by these strange indications convinced that he was the Son of God. His garments were parted, and lots cast upon his inward coat; they gave him vinegar and gall to drink; they broke not a bone of him, but they pierced his side with a spear, looking upon him whom they had pierced; according to the prophecies of him, which were so clear, and descended to particulars and circumstances of his passion, that there was nothing left, by which they could doubt whether this were he or no, who was to come into the world. But after all this, that all might be finally verified and no scruple left, after three

days' burial, a great stone being rolled to the face of the grave, and the stone sealed, and a guard of soldiers placed about it, he arose from the grave, and for forty days together conversed with his followers and disciples, and beyond all suspicion was seen of five hundred brethren at once, which is a number too great to give their consent and testimony to a lie, and it being so publicly and confidently affirmed at the very time it was done, and for ever after urged by all Christians, used as the most mighty demonstration, proclaimed, preached, talked of, even upbraided to the gainsayers, affirmed by eye-witnesses, it is infinitely removed from a reasonabe suspicion; and at the end of those days was taken up into heaven in the sight of many of them, as Elias was in the presence of Elisha.

6. Now he of whom all these things are true, must needs be more than a mere man; and that they were true, was affirmed by very many eye-witnesses, men who were innocent, plain men, men that had no bad ends to serve, men that looked for no preferment by the thing in this life; men to whom their Master

told they were to expect not crowns and sceptres, not praise of men or wealthy possessions, not power and ease, but a voluntary casting away care and attendance upon secular affairs that they might attend their ministry; poverty and prisons, trouble and vexation, persecution and labor, whippings and banishment, bonds and death; and for a reward they must stay till a good day came, but that was not to be at all in this world; and when the day of restitution and recompense should come, they should never know till it came, but upon the hope of this and the faith of Jesus, and the word of God so taught, so verified, they must rely wholly and for ever. Now let it be considered, how could matter of fact be proved better? And how could this be any thing but based upon matters of fact? What greater certainty can we have of any thing that was ever done, which we saw not, or heard not—but by the report of wise and honest persons? Especially since they were such, whose life and breeding was so far from ambition and pomp, that as they could not naturally and reasonably hope for any great number of proselytes,

so the fame that could be hoped for amongst them, as it must be a matter of their own procuring, and consequently uncertain—so it must needs be very inconsiderable, not fit to outweigh the danger and the loss, nor yet at all valuable to them whose education and pretences were against it. These we have plentifully. But if these men are numerous and united, it is more. Then we have more; for so many did affirm these things which they saw and heard, that thousands of people were convinced of the truth of them; but then if these offer their oath, it is yet more, but yet not so much as we have, for they sealed those things with their blood; they gave their life for a testimony; and what reward can any man expect, if he gives his life for a lie? Who shall make him a recompense, or what can tempt him to do it knowingly? But after all, it is to be remembered, that as God hates lying, so he hates incredulity: as we must not believe a lie, so neither stop up our eyes and ears against truth; and what we do every minute of our lives in matters of little and of great concernment, if we refuse to do in our religion

—which is yet to be conducted as other human affairs are, by human instruments and arguments of persuasion proper to the nature of the thing—it is an obstinacy that is as contrary to human reason as it is to Divine faith.

7. These things relate to the person of the holy Jesus; and prove sufficiently that it was extraordinary—that it was Divine—that God was with him—that his power wrought in him; and, therefore, that it was his will which Jesus taught, and God signed.

But then, if nothing of this kind had been, yet even the doctrine itself proves itself Divine and to come from God.

8. For it is a doctrine perfective of human nature, that teaches us to love God and to love one another, to hurt no man, and to do good to every man; it pledges to us the noblest, the highest, and the bravest pleasures of the world; the joys of charity, the rest of innocence, the peace of quiet spirits, the wealth of beneficence, and forbids us only to be beasts and to be devils; it allows all that God and nature intended, and only restrains the excrescences of nature, and forbids us to take

pleasure in that which is the only entertainment of devils, in murders and revenges, malice and spiteful words and actions; it permits corporal pleasures when they can best minister to health and to societies, to conservation of families and honor of communities; it teaches men to keep their words that themselves may be secured in all their just interests, and to do good to others that good may be done to them; it forbids biting one another, that we may not be devoured by one one another; and commands obedience to superiors, that we may not be ruined in confusion; it combines governments, and confirms all good laws, and makes peace, and opposes and prevents wars, where they are not just, and where they are not necessary. It is a religion that is life and spirit, not consisting in ceremonies and external amusements, but in the services of the heart, and the real fruit of lips and hands; that is, of good words and good deeds; it bids us to do that to God which is agreeable to his excellencies—that is, worship him with the best thing we have, and make all things else minister to it; it bids us to do that to our

neighbor by which he may be better; it is the perfection of the natural law, and agreeable to our natural necessities, and promotes our natural ends and designs; it does not destroy reason, but instructs it in very many things, and complies with it in all; it hath in it both heat and light, and is not more effectual than it is beauteous; it promises every thing that we can desire, and yet promises nothing but what it does effect; it proclaims war against all vices, and generally does command every virtue; it teaches us with ease to mortify those afflictions which reason durst scarce reprove, because she has not strength enough to conquer; and it does create in us those virtues, which reason of herself never knew—and after they are known, could never approve sufficiently; it is a doctrine in which nothing is superfluous or burdensome, nor yet is there any thing wanting, which can procure happiness to mankind, or by which God can be glorified; and if wisdom, and mercy, and justice, and simplicity, and holiness, and purity, and meekness, and contentedness, and charity, be images of God and rays of Divinity, then that doctrine in

which all these shine so gloriously, and in which nothing else is ingredient, must needs be before God; and that all this is true in the doctrine of Jesus, needs no other proof but the reading of the words.

9. For that the words of Jesus are contained in the gospels, that is, in the writings of them who were eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses of the actions and sermons of Jesus, is not at all to be doubted; for in every sect, we believe their own records of doctrine and institution; for it is madness to suppose the Christians to pretend to be servants of the laws of Jesus, and yet to make a law of their own, which he made not. No man doubts, but that the Koran is the law of Mahomet, that the Old Testament contains the religion of the Jews; and the authority of these books is proved by all the arguments of the religion, for all the arguments persuading to the religion are intended to prove no other than is contained in those books. And these having been for 1500 years and more, received by all Christian assemblies, if any man shall offer to make a question of their authority, he must declare his reasons—for the disciples of the religion have sufficient

presumption, security and possession, till they can be reasonably disturbed; but that now they can never be is infinitely certain, because we have a long, immemorial, universal tradition, that these books were written, in those times, by those men whose names they bear; they were accepted by all churches at the very first notice, except some few of the latter, which were first received by some churches, and then consented to by all; they were acknowledged by the same, and by the next age for genuine, their authority published, their words cited, appeals made to them in all questions of religion, because it was known and confessed that they wrote nothing but that they knew, so that they were not deceived; and to say they would lie, must be made to appear by something extrinsical to this inquiry, and was never so much as plausibly pretended by any adversaries, and it being a matter of another man's will, must be declared by actions, or not at all. But besides the men that wrote them were to be believed, because they did miracles; they wrote prophecies, which are verified by the event; and after all, that which the world ought to rely upon, is the

wisdom, and the providence, and the goodness of God; all which it concerned to take care that the religion, which himself so adorned and proved by miracles and mighty signs, should not be lost, nor any false writings be obtruded instead of true, lest, without our fault, the will of God become impossible to be obeyed.

But to return to the thing: all those excellent things which singly did make famous so many sects of philosophers, and marked so many princes of their sects, all there united, and many more which their eyes, dark and dim, could not see, are heaped together in this system of wisdom and holiness. Here are plain precepts full of deepest mystery; here are the measures of holiness and approaches to God described; obedience and conformity, mortification of the body, and elevations of the spirit, abstractions from earth, and arts of society and union with heaven, degrees of excellencies, and tendencies to perfection, imitations of God, and conversations with him; there are the heights and descents, upon the plain grounds of natural reason, and natural religion, for there is nothing commanded, but what our reason by nature ought to choose,

and yet nothing of natural reason taught, but what is heightened and made more perfect by the Spirit of God; and when there is any thing in the religion, that is against flesh and blood, it is only when flesh and blood is against us, and against reason, when flesh and blood either would hinder us from great felicity, or bring us into great misery. To conclude, it is such a law, that nothing can hinder men to receive and entertain, but a pertinacious baseness and love to vice; and none can receive it but those who resolve to be good and excellent; and if the holy Jesus had come into the world with less splendour of power and mighty demonstrations, yet even the excellency of what he taught, makes him alone fit to be the Master of the world.

10. But then let us consider what this excellent Person did effect, and with what instruments he brought so great things to pass. He was to put a period to the rites of Moses, and the religion of the temple, of which the Jews were zealous even unto pertinacy; to reform the manners of all mankind, to confound the wisdom of the Greeks, to break in pieces the power of the devil, to destroy the worship

of all false gods, to pull down their oracles, and change their laws, and by principles wise and holy, to reform the false discourses of the world.

But see what was to be taught, a trinity in the unity of the godhead, "Three are one, and One are three," that is the Christian arithmetic, so Lucian in his Philopatris, or some other, divides the Christian doctrine; see their philosophy, "all things are made of nothing"—and a Man-God and a God-Man, the same person finite and infinite, born in time, and yet from all eternity the Son of God, but yet born of a woman; resurrection of the dead, reunion of soul and body; this was part of the Christian physics or their natural philosophy. But then certainly their moral was easy and delicious. It is so, indeed, but not to flesh and blood, whose appetites it pretends to regulate or destroy, to restrain, or else to mortify; and repentance, and humility, loving our enemies, restitution of injuries, and self-denial, and taking up the cross, and losing all our goods, and giving our life for Jesus; as the other was hard to believe, so this is hard to do.

But for whom and under whose conduct was

all this to be believed, and all this to be done, and all this to be suffered? Surely for some glorious and mighty Prince, whose splendor as far outshines the Roman Empire as the jewels of Cleopatra outshone the swaddling clothes of the babe at Bethlehem. No; it was not so neither. For all this was for Jesus, whom his followers preached; a poor babe born in a stable, the son of a carpenter, cradled in a manger, wrapped in poor swaddling bands; it was for him whom they indeed called a God, but yet who, all the world knew, and they themselves said, was whipped at a post, and nailed to a cross; he fell under the malice of the Jews his countrymen, and the power of his Roman lords, a cheap and pitiful sacrifice, without beauty and without splendor. The design is great, but does not yet seem possible; but, therefore, let us see what instruments the holy Jesus chose to effect these so mighty changes, to persuade so many propositions, to endear so great sufferings, to overcome so great enemies, to master so many impossibilities, which this doctrine, and this law, from this master, were sure to meet withal.

11. Here, here it is that the Divinity of the power is proclaimed. When a man goes to war, he raises as great an army as he can to outnumber his enemy; but when God fights, three hundred men that lap like a dog are sufficient; nay, one word can dissolve the greatest army. He that means to effect any thing, must have means of his own proportionable; and if they be not, he must fail, or derive them from the mighty.

See then with what instruments the holy Jesus sets upon this great reformation of the world. Twelve men of obscure and poor birth, of contemptible trades and quality, without learning, without breeding; these men were sent into the midst of a knowing and wise world to dispute with the most famous philosophers of Greece, to out-wit all the learning of Athens, to out-preach all the Roman orators; to introduce into a newly settled empire, which would be impatient of novelties and change, such a change as must destroy all their temples, or remove thence all their gods; against which change all the zeal of the world, and all the passions, and all the seeming pretences which they could make, must needs be

violently opposed; a change that introduced new laws, and caused them to reverse the old, to change that religion under which their fathers long did prosper, and under which the Roman Empire obtained so great a grandeur, for a religion which in appearance was silly and humble, meek and peaceable, not apt indeed to do harm; but exposing men to do all the harm in the world, abating their courage, blunting their swords, teaching peace, and making the soldier's arms in a manner useless, and untying their military girdle; a religion that gave countenance to the poor and pitiful, (but in a time when riches were adored and ambition esteemed the greatest nobleness, and pleasure thought to be the chiefest good;) it brought no peculiar blessing to the rich or mighty, unless they would become poor and humble in some real sense or other; a religion that would change the face of things, and would also pierce into the secrets of the the soul, and unravel all the intrigues of hearts, and reform all evil manners, and break vile habits into gentleness and counsel; that such a religion, in such a time, preached

by such mean persons, should triumph over the philosophy of the world, and the arguments of the subtle, and the sermons of the eloquent, and the power of princes, and the interest of States, and the inclinations of nature, and the blindness of zeal, and the force of custom, and the pleasures of sin, and the busy arts of the devil; that is, against wit, and power, and money, and religion, and wilfulness, and fame, and empire, which are all the things in the world that can make a thing impossible; this, I say, could not be by the proper force of such instruments; for no man can span heaven with an infant's palm, nor govern wise empires with diagrams. It were imprudence to send a footman to command Cæsar to lay down his arms, to disband his legions, and throw himself into the Tiber, or keep a tavern next to Pompey's theatre; but if a sober man shall stand alone unarmed, undefended, or unprovided, and shall tell that he will make the sea stand still, or remove a mountain, or reduce Xerxes' army to the scantling of a single troop, he that believes he will and can do this, must believe that he does it by a higher power than he can yet perceive,

and so it was in the present transaction. For that the holy Jesus made invisible powers to do him visible honors; that his apostles hunted the demons from their tripods, their dens, their hollow pipes, their temples, and their altars; that he made the oracles silent, as Lucian, Porphyry, Celsus, and other heathen confess; that against the order of new things, which, let them be ever so profitable or good, do yet suffer reproach, and cannot prevail unless they commence in a time of advantage and favor—yet that this should flourish like the palm, by pressure, grow glorious by opposition, thrive by persecution, and was demonstrated by objections—argues a higher cause than the immediate instrument.

Now, how this higher cause did intervene is visible and notorious: the apostles were not learned, but the holy Jesus promised that he would send down wisdom from above, from the Father of spirits; they had no power, but they should be invested with power from on high; they were ignorant and timorous, but he would make them learned and confident, and so he did; he promised that, in a

few days, he would send the Holy Ghost upon them, and he did so; and after ten days, they felt and saw a glorious immission from heaven, lights of movable fire sitting upon their heads, and that light did illuminate their hearts, and the mighty rushing wind inspired them with a power of speaking divers languages, and brought to their remembrances all that Jesus did and taught—and made them wise to conduct souls, and bold to venture, and prudent to advise, and powerful to do miracles, and witty to convince gainsayers, and hugely instructed in the Scriptures, and gave them the spirit of government and the spirit of prophesy. This thing was so public, that, at the first notice of it, three thousand souls were converted on that very day, at the very time when it was done; for it was certainly a visible demonstration of an invisible power, that ignorant persons who were never taught, should, in an instant, speak all the languages of the Roman Empire; and indeed this thing was so necessary to be so, and so certain that it was so, so public and so evident, and so reasonable, and so useful, that it is not easy to say whether it was the indication of a

greater power or a greater wisdom. And now the means was proportionable enough to the biggest end; without learning they could not confute the learned world, but therefore God became their teacher; without power they could not break the devil's violence, but therefore God gave them power; without courage they could not contend against the violence of the Jews and Gentiles, but therefore God was their strength, and gave them fortitude; without great caution and providence they could not avoid the traps of crafty persecutors, but therefore God gave them caution, and made them provident; and as Bezaleel and Aholiab received the Spirit of God, the spirit of understanding, to enable them to work excellently in the tabernacle, so had the apostles to make them wise for the work of God and the ministries of his divine tabernacle, "which God pitched, not man." Immediately upon this, the apostles, to make a fulness of demonstration and an undeniable conviction, gave the Spirit to others also, to Jews and Gentiles, and to the men of Samaria, and they spake with tongues and prophesied; then they preached to all nations, and endured all per-

secutions, and cured all diseases, and raised the dead to life, and were brought before tribunals, and confessed the name of Jesus, and convinced the blasphemous Jews out of their own prophets, and not only prevailed upon women and weak men, but even upon the bravest and wisest. All the disciples of John the Baptist, the Nazarenes and Ebionites, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, Sergius the president, Dionysius an Athenian judge, and Polycarpus, Justinus and Irenæus, Athenagoras and Origen, Tertullian and Clemens of Alexandria, who could not be such fools, as, upon a matter not certainly true, but probably false, to unravel their former principles, and to change their liberty for a prison, wealth for poverty, honor for disreputation, life for death, if by such exchange they had not been secured of both truth and holiness and the will of God.

12. But above all these was Saul, a bold and a wise, a zealous and learned young man, who, going with letters to persecute the Christians of Damascus, was, by a light from heaven, called from his furious march, reproved by God's angel for persecuting the cause of

Jesus, was sent to the city, baptized by a Christian minister, instructed and sent abroad; and he became the prodigy of the world for learning and zeal, for preaching and writing, for labor and sufferance, for government and wisdom; he was admitted to see the holy Jesus after the Lord was taken into heaven; he was taken up into paradise; he conversed with angels; he saw unspeakable rays of glory; and besides that himself said it, who had no reason to lie, who could get nothing by it here but a complication of troubles, and who should get nothing by it hereafter if it were false—besides this, I say, that he did all those acts of zeal and obedience for the promotion of the religion, does demonstrate he had reason extraordinary for so sudden a change, so strange a labor, so frequent and incomparable sufferings; and, therefore, as he did and suffered so much upon such glorious motives, so he spared not to publish it to all the world, he spake it to kings and princes, he told it to the envious Jews; he had partners of his journey who were witnesses of the miraculous accident, and in his publication he urged the notoriousness of the fact, as a thing not feigned, not private,

but done at noon-day, under the test of competent persons; and it was a thing that proved itself, for it was effective of a present, a great, and a permanent change.

13. But now it is no new wonder, but a pursuance of the same congregation of great and divine things, that the fame and religion of Jesus was, with so incredible a swiftness, scattered over the face of the habitable world, from one end of the earth to the other; it filled all Asia immediately, it passed presently to Europe, and to the furthest Africans; and all the way it went, it told nothing but an holy and an humble story, that he who came to bring it into the world, died an ignominious death; and yet this death did not take away their courage, but added much; for they could not fear death for that Master, whom they knew to have, for their sakes, suffered death, and came to life again. But now infinite numbers of persons, of all sexes, and all ages, and all countries, came in to the cross of Christ; and he that was crucified in the reign of Tiberias, was, in the time of Nero, even in Rome itself, and in Nero's family, by many persons, esteemed for a God; and it was upon public record that he

was so acknowledged; and this was by a Christian, Justin Martyr, urged to the senate, and to the emperors themselves, who, if it had been otherwise, could easily have confuted the bold allegation of the Christian, who yet did die for that Jesus, who was so speedily reputed for a God; the cross was worn upon breasts, drawn upon foreheads, carried on banners, and yet the Christians were sought for to punishments, and exquisite punishments sought forth for them; their goods were confiscated, their names odious, prisons were their houses, and so many kinds of tortures invented for them, that Domitius Ulpianus hath spent seven books in describing the variety of tortures the poor Christian was put to at his first appearing; and yet in despite of all this, and ten thousand other objections and impossibilities, whatsoever was for them, made the religion grow, and whatsoever was against them, made it grow;—if they had peace, the religion was prosperous—if they had persecution it was still prosperous;—if princes favored them, the world came in because the Christians lived holily; if princes were incensed, the world came

in because the Christians died bravely. They sought for death with greediness; they desired to be grinded in the teeth of lions; and with joy they beheld the wheels and the bended trees; the racks and the gibbets, the fires and the burning irons, which were like the chair of Elias to them, instruments to carry them to heaven, into the bosom of their beloved Jesus.

14. Who would not acknowledge the Divinity of this person, and the excellency of this institution, that should see infants to weary the hands of hangmen for the testimony of Jesus, and wise men preach this doctrine for no other visible reward, but shame and death, poverty and banishment; and hangmen converted by the blood of martyrs springing upon their faces, which their impious hands and cords have strained through their flesh? Who would not have confessed the honor of Jesus when he should see devils tremble at the mention of Jesus, and the world running to the honor of the poor Nazarene? Could a few fishermen and a publican effect all this for the son of a poor maiden of Judea? Can we suppose all the world, or so great a part of

mankind, can consent by chance, or suffer such changes for nothing, or for any thing less than this? The son of the poor maiden was the Son of God, and the fisherman spake by a Divine Spirit, and they caught the world by holiness and miracles, with wisdom and power bigger than the strength of all the Roman legions. And what can be added to all this, but this thing alone to prove the Divinity of Jesus? He is a God, or at least is taught by God, who can foretell future contingencies; and so did the holy Jesus, and so did his disciples.

15. Our blessed Lord, when he was alive, foretold that, after his death, his religion should flourish more than when he was alive; he foretold persecutions to his disciples; he foretold the mission of the Holy Ghost to be in a very few days after his ascension, which within ten days came to pass; he prophesied that the fact of Mary Magdalene in anointing the head and feet of her Lord, should be public and known as the Gospel itself, and spoken of in the same place; he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and the signs of its approach, and that it should be by war; and particularly,

after the manner of prophets, symbolically named the nation that should do it, pointing out the Roman eagles; he foretold his death, and the manner of it; and plainly, beforehand, published his resurrection, and told them it should be the sign to that generation, namely, the great argument to prove him to be the Christ; he prophesied that there should arise false Christs after him, and it came to pass, to the extreme great calamity of the nation; and, lastly, he foretold that his beloved disciple, St. John, should tarry upon the earth till his coming again, that is, to his coming to judgment upon Jerusalem; and that his religion should be preached to the gentiles, that it should be scattered over all the world, and be received by all nations; that it should stay upon the face of the earth till his last coming to judge the world, and that "the gates of hell should not be able to prevail against his Church;" which prophecy is made good thus long, till this day, and is a continual argument to justify the Divinity of the Author; the continuance of the religion helps to continue it, for it proves that it came from God, who foretold that it should continue; and, therefore, it must

continue, because it came from God; and, therefore, it came from God, because it does and shall for ever continue, according to the word of the holy Jesus.

16. But after our blessed Lord was entered into glory, the disciples also were prophets. Agabus foretold the dearth that was to be in the Roman Empire in the days of Claudius Cæsar, and that St. Paul should be bound at Jerusalem; St. Paul foretold the entering in of heretics into Asia after his departure; and he, and St. Peter, and St. Jude, and generally the rest of the apostles, had two great predictions, which they used, not only as a verification of the doctrine of Jesus, but as a means to strengthen the hearts of the disciples, who were so broken with persecution; the one was, that there should arise a sect of vile men, who should be enemies to religion and government, and cause a great apostacy, which happened notoriously in the sect of the Gnostics, which those three apostles and St. John notoriously and plainly do describe; and the other was, that although the Jewish nation did mightily oppose the religion, it should be but for awhile, for they should be destroyed in a short time,

and their nation made extremely miserable; but for the Christians, if they would fly from Jerusalem, and go to Pella, there should not a hair of their head perish. The verification of this prophecy the Christians extremely longed for, and wondered it staid so long, and began to be troubled at the delay, and suspected all was not well, when the great proof of their religion was not verified; and while they were in thoughts of heart concerning it, the overthrow did come, and swept away one million one hundred thousand of the nation, and from that day forward the nation was broken in pieces with intolerable calamities, they are scattered over the face of the earth, and are a vagabond nation, but yet like oil in a vessel of wine, broke into bubbles, but kept in their own circles, and they shall never be an united people till they are servants of the holy Jesus; but shall remain without priests or temple, without altar or sacrifice, without city or country, without the land of promise, or the promise of a blessing, till our Jesus is their High Priest, and the Shepherd to gather them into his fold; and this very thing is a mighty demonstration against the Jews by their own pro-

phets; for when Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Malachi, had prophesied the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, and the change of the old law, and the introduction of a new by the Messias—that this was he, was therefore certain, because he taught the world a new law; and presently after the publication of this, the old was abrogated, and not only went into desuetude, but into a total abolition among all the world; and for those of the remnant of the scattered Jews, who obstinately blaspheme, the law is become impossible to them, and they are placed in such circumstances that they need not dispute concerning its obligation; for it being external and corporal, ritual, and at last made also local, when circumstances are impossible, the law that was wholly ceremonial and circumstantial must needs pass away; and when they have lost their priesthood, they cannot retain the law; as no man takes care to have his beard shaved when his head is off.

17. And it is a wonder to consider, how the anger of God is gone out upon that miserable people, and that so great a blindness is fallen

upon them; it being evident and notorious, that the Old Testament was nothing but a shadow and umbrage of the New; that the prophesies of that are plainly verified in this; that all the predictions of the Messias are most undeniably accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ, so that they cannot, with any plausibleness or color, be turned any other way, and be applied to any other person; although the Jews make illiterate allegations, and prodigious dreams, by which they have fooled themselves for sixteen hundred years together, and still hope without reason, and are confident without revelation, and pursue a shadow while they quit the glorious body; while in the mean time, the Christian prays for his conversion, and is at rest in the truth of Jesus, and hath certain inexpressible confidences and internal lights, illuminations of the Holy Spirit of God, and love to the holy Jesus produced in his soul—that he will die when he cannot dispute, and is satisfied and he knows not how, and is sure by comforts, and comforted by the excellency of his belief, which speaks nothing but holiness, and light and reason, and peace and satisfactions in-

finite; because he is sure that all the world can be happy if they would live by the religion of Jesus, and that neither societies of men nor single persons can have felicity but by this—and that, therefore, God, who so decrees to make men happy, hath also decreed that it shall for ever be upon the face of the earth, till the earth itself shall be no more. Amen.

18. Now if, against this vast heap of things, any man shall but confront the pretences of any other religion, and see how they fail both of reason and holiness, of wonder and Divinity; how they enter by force, and are kept up by human interests; how ignorant and unholy, how unlearned and pitiful are their pretences, the darkness of these must add great eminence to the brightness of that. For the Jews' religion, which came from heaven, is, therefore, not now to be practised, because it did come from heaven, and was to expire into the Christian, it being nothing but the image of this perfection; and the Jews needed no other argument but this, that God hath made theirs impossible now to be done—for he that ties to ceremonies and outward usages, temples and altars, sacrifices and priests, troublesome and

expensive rites, and figures of future signification, means that there should be an abode and fixed dwelling, for these are not to be done by an ambulatory people; and, therefore, since God hath scattered the people into atoms and crumbs of society, without temple or priest, without sacrifice or altar, without Urim or Thummim, without prophet or vision, even communicating with them in no way but by ordinary providence, it is but too evident, that God hath nothing to do with them in the matter of that religion, but that it is expired, and no way obligatory on them or pleasing to him, which is become impossible to be acted; whereas the Christian religion is as eternal as the soul of man, and can no more cease than our spirits can die, and can worship upon mountains and caves, in fields and churches, in peace and war, in solitude and society, in persecution and in sunshine, by night and by day, and be solemnized by clergy and laity in the essential parts of it, and is the perfection of the soul, and the highest reason of man, and the glorification of God.

19. But for the heathen religions, it is evidently to be seen, that they are nothing but

an abuse of the natural inclination which all men have to worship a God, whom because they know not, they guess at in the dark; for that they know there is and ought to be something that hath the care and providence of their affairs. But the body of their religion is nothing but little arts of governments, and stratagems of princes, and devices to secure the government of new usurpers, or to make obedience to the laws sure, by being sacred, and to make the yoke that was not natural, pleasant by something that is. But yet for the whole body of it, who sees not their worshippings could not be sacred, because they were done by something that is impure? They appeased their gods with adulteries and impure mixtures, by such things which Cato was ashamed to see, by gluttonous eatings of flesh, and impious drinkings; and they sacrificed men, and women, and children to their demons—as is notorious in the rites of Bacchus Omerta amongst the Greeks, and of Jupiter, to whom a Greek and a Greekess, a Galatian and a Galatess, were yearly offered; in the answers of the oracles to Calchas, as appears in Homer and Virgil; who sees not that crimes

were warranted by the example of their immortal gods, and that what did dishonor themselves, they sang to the honor of their gods, whom they affirmed to be passionate and proud, jealous and revengeful, fearful and impatient, drunken and sleepy, weary and wounded; that the religions were made lasting by policy and force, by ignorance and the force of custom, by the preferring an inveterate error, and loving a quiet and prosperous evil, by the arguments of pleasure and the correspondences of sensuality, by the fraud of oracles, and the patronage of vices; and because they feared of every change as an earthquake, as supposing overturnings of their old error to be the eversion of their well established governments; and it had been ordinarily impossible that ever Christianity should have entered, if the nature and excellency of of it had not been such as to enter like rain into a fleece of wool, or the sun into a window without noise or violence, without emotion and disordering the political constitution, without causing trouble to any man but what his own ignorance or peevishness was pleased to spin out of his own bowels; but did establish go-

vernments, secure obedience, made the laws firm, and the persons of princes to be sacred; it did not oppose force by force, nor "strike princes for justice;" it defended itself against enemies by patience, and overcame them by kindness; it was the great instrument of God to demonstrate his power in our weakness, and to do good to mankind by the imitation of his excellent goodness.

20. Lastly; he that considers concerning the religion and person of Mahomet, that he was a vicious person, lustful and tyrannical—that he propounded incredible and ridiculous propositions to his disciples—that it entered by the sword, by blood and violence, by murder and robbery—that it propounds sensual rewards, and allures to compliance by bribing our basest lusts; that it conserves itself by the same means it entered; that it is unlearned and foolish, against reason and the discourses of all wise men—that it did no miracles and made false prophesies; in short, that in the person that founded it, in the article it persuades, in the manner of prevailing, in the reward it offers, it is unholy, and foolish, and rude; it must needs appear to be void of all

pretence, and that no man of reason can ever be falsely persuaded by arguments, that it is the daughter of God, and came down from heaven.

Since, therefore, there is nothing to be said for any other religion, and so very much for Christianity, every one of whose pretences can be proved as well as the things themselves do require, and as all the world expects such things should be proved; it follows that the holy Jesus is the Son of God; that his religion is commanded by God, and is that way by which he will be worshipped and honored, and that "there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved, but only by the name of the Lord Jesus." He that puts his soul upon this, cannot perish; neither can he be reproved, who hath so much reason and argument for his religion.

I pray God "my soul may be remembered amongst the Christians."

THE END.

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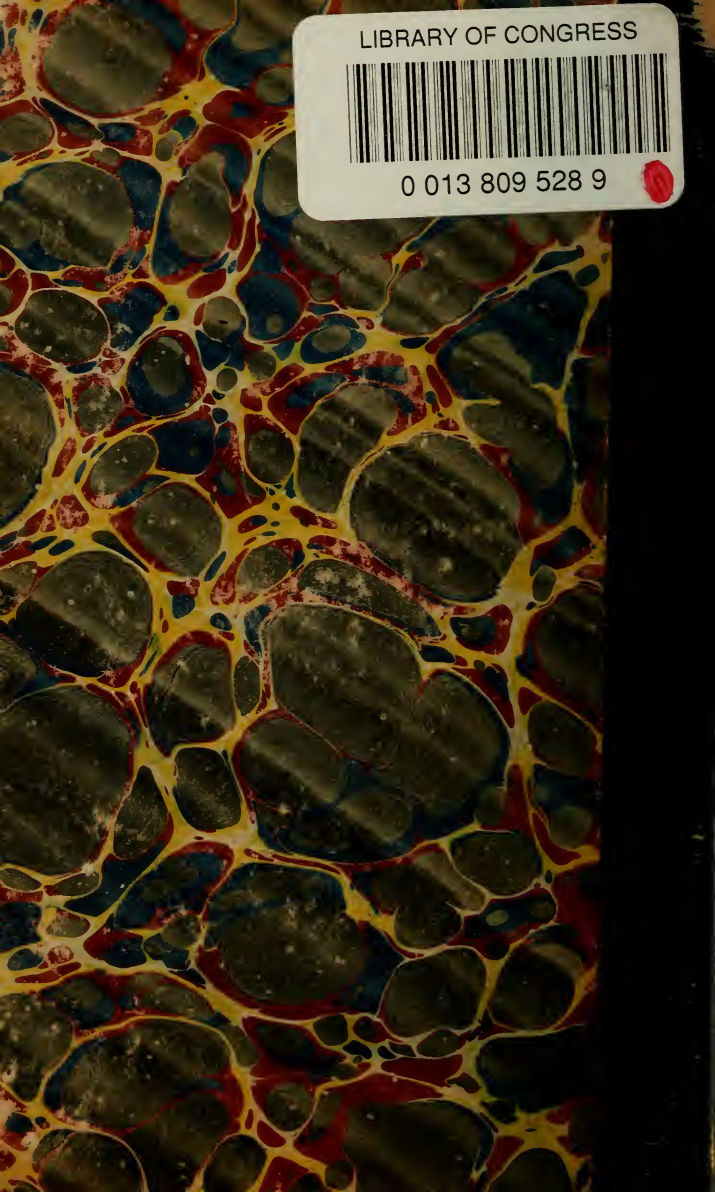
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